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Chaos — Think Thirteen — Here Comes The NEW ISBN!

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Tell your systems people to get ready for the next problem after Y2K. By January 1, 2006, their systems must be able to contain a 13 Digit International Standard Book Number (ISBN) instead of the 10 digit ISBN we've all come to know and love. This article describes the background and reasoning for moving to the 13 digit ISBN and what is now known about the transition, along with lots of questions to be answered in the future. YOUR INPUT TO THE PROCESS OF ANSWERING THOSE QUESTIONS WILL HELP!!!

Why Move to a 13 Digit ISBN?

There are several concerns prompting the move to 13 digits. One of the primary ones is the need to accommodate more "editions" of books in the future. Today, we have the hardback, trade paperback, mass market paperback and audio versions of the same work. We also have the **Rocket e-Book** edition, the **Softbook** edition, and, as we heard in Frankfurt, the **Microsoft e-Book** reader edition. **Pearson Education** tells us that they will provide intellectual property marked in XML, SGML, or whatever ML or PDF you want. Print-on-demand editions may or may not need a different ISBN, depending upon whether they are produced by the same publisher in the "same format" as the original, or if the product is now owned by a different rights-holder and/or is printed to look different from the original. All of these editions will proliferate and may/will need ISBNs in the very near future.

Another reason is that books carry the **Bookland EAN** bar code on their covers and it is often scanned by wholesalers, retailers and some libraries. To insure that the numbers in the EAN and those in the database are identical, the full 13 digit Bookland EAN is recommended for databases.

Webworthy from page 83

the term used for **Greenwich Mean Time**.
<http://www.time.gov/>

Geography

You'll never have to buy an updated globe for your study again. Just rely on the **National Geographic**, whose latest digital world atlas provides free customized maps. View a Mercator projection of the world from a political viewpoint, or browse the satellite im-

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Further in this area, sheet music identified with the **International Standard Music Number (ISMN)** actually may appear to be books—and duplicates of ISBNs—when bar coded using the Bookland EAN. Therefore, thought has been given to differentiating ISBNs and ISMNs in bar codes and databases.

A final reason—and the reason to move to 13 digits instead of 11 or 12—is to accommodate the requirement that books appear in databases in a retail environment (and the same may well be true of many libraries) with non-book materials that carry the 12 digit U.P.C. if they come from North America or the 13 digit EAN if they are from some other country. Retailers in North America have been given until December 31, 2005 to be able to hold the 13 digit EAN or U.P.C. (the current one with a leading 0) in their databases. So, that's the date we've selected for this implementation as well.

How Will We Do It?

The agreement signed by the **Uniform Code Council** (U.S.-based owners of the U.P.C.), **EAN International** (in Brussels) and the **International ISBN Agency Headquarters** (in Berlin) provided the prefixes 978 AND 979 to the book community. So far, we have only used 978. In fact, in our 10-digit ISBN world of today, if we used 979 in front of our ISBN, it would simply identify the SAME ISBN, although it would have a different 13th (check) digit, confusing many systems that scan the bar codes. The only legitimate use of 979 has been by the sheet music folks who have used it, converting the leading "M" in their identifier to a 0 (zero). Therefore, were we to put the full 13 digits of ISMNs into a database, they would all start 9790.

So, in order to DOUBLE (or almost double) the number of possible ISBNs in the future to accommodate those new types of editions described earlier in this article, this author made a presentation to the **International ISBN Agency Advisory Panel** session in late October in London (from which this article is actually being written) on behalf of **Book And Serial Industry Communications (BASIC)**. It is the folks in BASIC who are being asked to deal with the new formats in EDI and to assign these formats standard identifiers that can be distributed with bibliographic information about them. The concepts presented there (and below) have the general agreement of the BASIC constituents and the Director of the International ISBN

Agency. (If they are not accepted in this week's Advisory Panel meeting, I'll send Katina an update of this article.)

The exact "how" is to assign all future sheet music identified by the ISMN to the range of numbers starting 9790, since that's where the current group sits. Next, all books currently are identified with numbers starting 978, so that would be retained, as well. That leaves the numbers 9791xxxxxxx through 9799999999999 available for assignment to new editions of books.

Some Basic Decisions Needing Your Input

There are several areas of concern about the "understanding" folks get from "reading" an ISBN today. The first relates to the lead digit; it is said to represent the country or language of the geographic location of the publisher. Thus, English language countries, including the U.S., U.K., Australia, English-speaking Canada, etc. use the lead digit 0 (zero) or 1 (one); Japan uses the leading digit 4. However, right down the block from my office is the U.S. office of **Kodansha Publishing Company**, and they assign ISBNs starting with 4 to all of their new titles, which are published in English.

Another aspect of the ISBN is our ability, they say, to identify the publisher from the digits that follow the first dash. So, when I worked there, we knew that **Random House** was always 0-394. However, now that Random House sold all of its college textbooks to another publisher and was subsequently purchased by those responsible for assigning ISBNs to **Bantam**, **Doubleday** and **Dell** titles under the new corporate name **Random House**, what can I really tell about a book with an ISBN starting 0394? Not too much!

Is there anything to be gained by putting ANY MEANING into the new 979-based ISBNs? This is the question in my presentation and the one I ask you. The **International ISBN Agency** will be seeking advice from local agencies and affected parties over this next year, so that they can prepare for 2005. If you see reasons for meaning in the number, contact me at **BASIC** (Sandy@bookinfo.org), phone 212/929-1393 or fax 212/989-7542. I will coordinate your thoughts with the input received by the US ISBN Agency, so that we can provide solid, meaningful U.S. input to the International Agency next year. Thank you!! 🐱